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Political and Organizational Context of Space Program

James E. Webb, NASA Administrator,
Talk before American Society of Newspaper Editors,
Washington, D. C., April 20, 1963

To understand how the National Space Program will move forward, it should be considered within the context of our political system in which such undertakings can progress only as the President recommends the funds to Congress and the representatives of the people accept and approve these recommendations. In this connection, it may not have been widely noted that in 1962 the House of Representatives unanimously approved the program and the Senate voted for it overwhelmingly. And it is significant that the House Space Committee took 3,300 pages of testimony last year and, in examining the budget this year, will probably take more than 4,000 pages.

A key challenge to the space agency has been to organize the space effort within the framework of our free enterprise system. We are expending 90 percent of our funds through contracts. The basic scientific resources of the nation rest in the universities where exchanges of knowledge among the various disciplines constitute one of the most important ingredients of success in very advanced areas of research. In organizing these resources into a rounded program, we are making sure that government funds are well invested to insure the continuity of effort needed for such requirements as the three to five years it takes to develop a large rocket engine.

It is interesting to note that when NASA was established in 1958, it was set up as an agency with a single administrator, rather than as a commission. In this regard, note also that the NASA Administrator, Associate Administrator, and Deputy Administrator meet on every major policy decision. They also consider award of every contract of more than \$5 million.

In addition, NASA has endeavored in its work with industry, universities, and other organizations to conduct its business so that these institutions are strengthened rather than weakened as they carry out our contracts.

Space Has Many Implications

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Space exploration means many things to many people, ranging from the importance of space-generated science and technology to this country's position of world leadership, and the economic benefits that will come to us from the great flow of new knowledge from space, to the vital role of an over-all space competence to national defense.

Intellectually, space exploration challenges us to enlarge our perspectives enormously, from the old self-oriented view of the universe.

To the scientist, space exploration has many fascinating aspects. First, it provides the opportunity to send instruments above the earth's atmosphere and far beyond the vicinity of the earth. Instruments can make precise measurements of space phenomena in many different areas of science, and these measurements can be related to one another in a way never before possible.

Then, too, the scientist regards the universe as a vast newly-available laboratory which permits experiments on a scale that no earth-based laboratory could approach.

To the engineer the space program means to drive forward rapidly in the areas of expanding scientific knowledge and to utilize this advancing knowledge to improve performance of instruments, spacecraft, and the boosters that send them out into space.

To the Defense Department, space holds a very deep concern as to whether this technology, developed to the utmost by another nation, could be used to threaten our security. On the other hand, the space program offers our country the opportunity to bring together scientists on advanced work in the universities, and scientists and engineers in government laboratories with those in the

vast industrial complex upon which our power as a nation rests. It offers the individual the chance to push forward in close relationship with others in his discipline so that he can be in the vanguard of current knowledge and its applications to the security of the country and to our economic progress.

Industrialists think of the space program in several ways. The most obvious one is the opportunity for contracts. Perhaps more important, is the opportunity to participate in work going forward in the most advanced areas of technological utilization of the new scientific knowledge, so that a given firm will acquire the competence to meet the technical problems that the new age is sure to bring. Work on the new frontiers of knowledge is, in fact, technological insurance -- insurance to the industrialist against competitors developing products or processes that will make his own position obsolete.

Our national leaders are concerned that the world know us as a nation that can accomplish what it starts out to accomplish. This country must master in a way understood by both the emerging nations and the older nations the means to put into service such practical applications of space technology as communication satellites and weather satellites, satellites for navigation, and data-gathering satellites. These new device indicate to the world, as nothing else could, the standing of a country in advanced science and technology.